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## The IRON TRAIL

By REX BEACH

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**SYNOPSIS**

Murray O'Neill, railroad builder, on his way to Alaska, is a passenger on the Nebraskan. The ship runs aground. O'Neill helps Captain Johnny Brennan to quell a panic among the passengers.

As the ship settles O'Neill is accosted by a beautiful girl, and he plunges overboard with her. They are picked up by Captain Brennan. She proves to be Natalie Gerard, whose mother is the friend of Curtis Gordon. O'Neill's unscrupulous business rival.

O'Neill and Natalie journey to Hope to get her. She tells him of her mother and Gordon. When they arrive at Hope Gordon meets them.

O'Neill is impressed with the magnetism of his rival, but is sure his plans are unworkable. Tom Slater quits Gordon for O'Neill. They go to Cortes in time to save Dan Appleton in a crooked card game.

In the momentary lull when they moved Happy Tom Slater, who had frequently seen his employer in action and understood storm signals, sighted clouds and reached for the nearest land. With a wrench of his powerful hands he loosed a log. Although Mr Slater adored trouble, he was accustomed to meet it philosophically. A lifetime spent in construction camps had taught him that of all weapons the one best suited to his use was a pick handle. Second to that he had come to value the hardwood leg of a chair. But in the present case his preparation proved needless, for the log was over before he had fairly prepared himself.

Without waiting for O'Neill to put his accusation into words Denny had risen swiftly, and in doing so he had either purposely or by accident made a movement which produced a prompt and instinctive reaction. Murray's fist met him as he arose, met him so squarely and with such force that he lost all interest in what followed. The other card players silently gathered Mr. Denney in their arms and stretched him upon a disused roulette table. The bartender appeared with a wet towel and began to bathe his temples.

Appleton, dazed by the suddenness of it all, found a stack of gold pieces in his hand and heard O'Neill saying in an everyday tone:

"Come to my room, please. I'd like to talk to you." Something commanding in the speaker's face made the engineer follow against his will. He longed to loiter here until Denny regained his senses, but O'Neill had him by the arm, and a moment later he was being led down the hall away from the lobby and the barroom. As Slater, who had followed, closed the door behind them Dan burst forth:

"By Jove! Why didn't you tell me? I knew he was crooked, but I couldn't believe it."

"Sit down," said O'Neill. "He won't pull himself together for awhile, and

crossed gave a passage through the guardian range, and this tundra—O'Neill estimated that he could lay a mile of track a day over it—led right up to the glaciers. Once through the coast range building would be easy, for the upper Salmon was navigable, and its banks presented no difficulties to track laying.

He turned abruptly to Appleton, who was pulling up his coat.

"What do you know about that canyon?" he asked.

"Not much. Nobody knows much, for those fellows who went through in the gold rush have all left the country. Gordon's right of way comes in above, and so does the trust's. From there on I know every foot of the ground."

Camp was pitched late that night far out on the flats. During the preparation of supper Murray sat staring fixedly before him, deaf to all sounds and insensible to the activities of his companions. He had lost his customary breeziness and his good nature. He was curt, saturnine, unsmiling. Appleton undertook to arouse him from this abstraction, but Slater drew the young man aside hurriedly with a warning:

(Continued next week)

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